

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for providing information for the remote support of one or more devices connected to a computer, comprising:

installing an information harvester and a formatter onto the computer;

using the information harvester, identifying and testing the one or more devices and collecting information about the devices and the testing;

formatting at least some of the collected information for display to the user and presentation to a support specialist;

displaying the formatted information as part of a user display also having provision whereby a user may enter additional comments about device problems into the user display;

if a user so chooses, collecting any comments that the user provides and sending the combined formatted collected information and the collected user comments to a support specialist by means of a network transport mechanism such as e-mail, TCP, or the like.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the using the information harvester step further comprises:

using an network browser located on the user's computer to run the information harvester as an network browser application.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the using an information harvester step further comprises:

enumerating at least some of the devices connected to the user's computer;

testing the enumerated devices;

using the standard APIs of the operating system installed on the computer to execute the enumerating and testing steps; and

outputting the results of enumeration and testing to a file.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the formatting, displaying, collecting and sending steps further comprise:

reading the file, formatting at least some of the data it contains, and then displaying the formatted data as part of a document suitable for user display and including at least one text entry window or other user input arrangement into which a user may add additional comments; and

if the user so chooses, sending this document, complete with any added user comments, to a support specialist.

5. The method of claim 4, the sending step further comprising:

sending the collected information from the user's computer to a server; and  
sending the collected information from the server to the support specialist.

6. The method of claim 1, the sending step further comprising:

sending the collected information from the user's computer to a server; and  
sending the collected information from the server to the support specialist.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

formatting the user display as a document; and  
if a user so chooses, sending this document to a support specialist as an e-mail attachment.

8. The method of claim 7, the sending step further comprising:

sending the e-mail and its attachment from computer to a server; and

forwarding the e-mail and its attachment, or sending another e-mail with this same attachment, from the server to the support specialist.

9. The method of claim 1, the sending step further comprising:

sending the combined formatted collected information and the collected user comments from the user's computer to a server by means of a network transport mechanism; and

sending this same information and comments from the server to the support specialist also by means of a network transport mechanism.

10. A system for providing information for the remote support of one or more devices connected to a computer having an operating system, said system comprising:

an information harvester installed on the computer and arranged to identify and test the one or more devices and to collect information about the devices and the testing;

a formatter installed on the computer and arranged to reformat the collected information into a format suitable for display to a user and presentation to a support specialist;

an network browser installed on the computer that can display network pages;

one or more network pages installed on the computer and arranged both to display the reformatted collected information and also to accept additional comments from a user; and

a user sender that can, at the option of a user, send one or more network pages, complete with reformatted collected information and any additional comments from a user, to a support specialist by means of a network transport mechanism such as e-mail, TCP, or the like.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the information harvester and formatter are designed so that they may run under the control of the network browser.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein

the information harvester includes a device enumerator that identifies the devices connected to the user's computer and a device tester that determines whether any given device is working properly, and

the information harvester is designed to output a file containing the results of enumeration and testing.

13. The system of claim 12 wherein

the device enumerator and the device tester both are arranged to use the standard APIs of the operating system.

14 A system for providing information for the remote support of one or more devices connected to a computer, said system comprising:

information harvesting means for identifying and testing the one or more devices and for collecting information about the devices and the testing;

formatting means for reformatting the information collected by the harvesting means for display to a user and for presentation to a support specialist;

an network browser installed on the computer with the capability of displaying network pages;

network page display means utilizing the network browser for displaying one or more network pages containing the formatted information, the network pages including user data input means for accepting comments from a user; and

user sending means for, at the option of the user, sending the reformatted collected information and any additional comments provided by a user to a support specialist by means of a network transport mechanism such as e-mail, TCP, or the like.